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ABSTRACT

Because foreign language placement at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is based solely on College Entrance Examination Board Foreign Language Placement Test scores, first semester courses are composed of students with heterogeneous foreign language backgrounds. French 101 was chosen to study the relationship between two entering variables--number of high school units in French, and number of years intervening between the last high school French course and 101 enrollment--and several French 101 in-class achievement variables. Data were gathered from 86% of one semester's French 101 enrollment. These data indicated that students with no French high school units showed higher drop rates, lower in-class test scores, and lower final grades compared to students with French high school units. Specific comparisons between students with 0 and 2 French high school units indicated that differences in test scores decreased across the semester. Examination of the intervening years variable indicated that it was not systematically related to course performance. The authors concluded that the College Board French Placement Test is not an appropriate instrument for placing college students into lower level French courses. Implications for other first semester foreign language courses are discussed, and several short- and long-term recommendations are made. (Author/GDC)

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Research Report

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TITLE

In-Class Achievement in College Foreign Language Study Related to High School Foreign Language Study: Implications for Course Placement

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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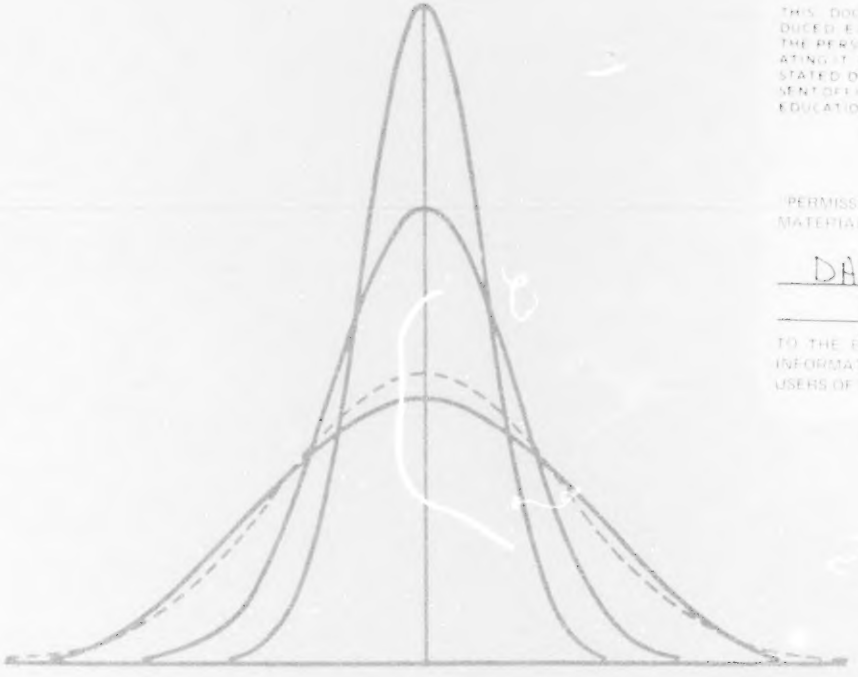

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Abstract

Because foreign language placement at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is based solely on College Entrance Examination Board Foreign Language Placement Test scores, first semester courses are composed of students with heterogeneous foreign language backgrounds. French 101 was chosen to study the relationship between two entering variables, number of French high school units and number of years intervening between the last high school French course and 101 enrollment, and several French 101 in-class achievement variables.

The results of this study are based on data gathered from 86% of the fall 1976 French 101 enrollment. These data indicated that students with no French high school units showed higher drop rates, lower in-class test scores, and lower final grades compared to students with French high school units. Specific comparisons between students with 0 and 2 French high school units indicated that differences in test scores decreased across the semester. Examination of the intervening years variable indicated that it was not systematically related to course performance.

Generalizations of these results to other first semester foreign language courses are discussed and several short and long term recommendations are made. The short term recommendations include special sections for students with no high school units and special advising for students with 3 high school units placed into first semester courses. The long term recommendations relate to the development of local placement tests, foreign language grading policy, and advising practices at the high school and college levels.

This report was written primarily for the benefit of University of Illinois foreign language departments who use the College Entrance Examination Board tests for placement and for the LAS Foreign Language Committee. The results, conclusions, and recommendations may also be of interest to University of Illinois student advisors, Illinois high school foreign language departments, and foreign language departments on other campuses which have placement policies similar to those employed at the University of Illinois.

In-Class Achievement in College Foreign Language Study Related to High School Foreign Language Study: Implications for Course Placement

Nancy F. Halff and David A. Frisbie

Introduction

First semester (101) foreign language courses at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) are composed of students who either have no formal high school study in that language or have had 1, 2, or even 3 high school units (HSU) in that language. One unit equals one year of study. "Backplacing" students with 1 or more HSU to first semester courses is the result of a campus policy which dictates that placement be based on the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) Foreign Language Reading Placement Test scores rather than years of high school study.[1]

"Backplacing" students with HSU to the 101 level is not a rare event. For example, in 1974 74% of the 397 students with 2 French units who took the French placement exam were placed into French 101 as were 30% of the 205 students with 3 units. The primary objective of the placement tests is to create homogeneous course groupings with respect to achievement. Since students with HSU who are backplaced to the first semester level score extremely poorly (less than eight items correct) on the placement tests, they have been assumed to be on an equal footing with students who have had no HSU in the language. But a recent analysis of first semester foreign language grades indicated that this may not be the case (Halff, Note 1).

For 1973 and 1974, the two years studied by Halff, it was found that first semester Spanish, French, and Latin final grades were positively related to number of HSU. On the average, students with 0 HSU in the language studied received lower final grades in 101 than students who did have HSU. In addition, students with 0 HSU in the 101 language in which they enrolled did have HSU in another foreign language and, on the average, their ACT and SCAT scores and their High School Percentile Ranks were similar to those of students who did have HSU. Thus, the poorer 101 grades of students with 0 HSU could not be attributed to either a complete lack of foreign language study or a generally poorer preentry academic performance level. A follow-up of the 1973 students just described indicated that unlike their 101 final grades, their 102 final grades were not related to amount of high school study. The problem seemed to be confined to first semester foreign language courses.

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[1]Students may switch their placement after consulting the department involved. Within the sample discussed in this study, 10 students switched from a 102 placement to 101.

Purpose of This Study

Before making recommendations which might remedy a situation in which students are apparently disadvantaged through no fault of their own, it was necessary to gather data which would answer the questions posed in the following paragraphs.

Do a greater percentage of 0 HSU students drop the course compared to students with HSU? If students who had 0 HSU performed at a low level early in the semester, it seemed likely that some would become discouraged and drop the course rather than try competing with students who had studied French in high school.

Are the differences in final grades observed between students with 0 HSU and 1-3 HSU due to differences in performance throughout the semester or are they confined to only a part of the semester? One likely explanation of the differences in final grades is that students with HSU show superior performance early in the semester compared to students without HSU. But by the end of the semester the two groups exhibit similar performance levels. If this is the case, the discrepancy in final grades is primarily the result of performance differences early in the semester rather than a reflection of final performance levels. The lack of carry-over of the relationship between HSU and final grades found at the 101 level to the 102 level lends some support to this explanation.

Are the intervening years (IY) between completion of the last high school French course and 101 enrollment related to performance? Since many students with HSU complete their last high school foreign language course 1, 2, or 3 years prior to taking a UIUC 100 level course, it was also of interest to monitor in-class performance of students with different IY. It seemed likely that in-class performance would be negatively related to IY, particularly early in the semester. If such a relationship did exist, then it would be important to know if students with HSU showed performance levels similar to students without HSU after a specified IY.

The information gained by answering these questions is essential to developing course structures and/or placement procedures which are educationally sound and fair to all students who enroll in first semester language courses. The fall 1975 French 101 course was selected to provide the data necessary to describe the relationship between HSU, IY, and in-class performance.

Method

Sample

The initial sample was composed of the 328 students who enrolled in 15 sections of French 101 fall 1975 and took at least one in-class test. The final sample of 283 students was composed of all students who had both high school units information and in-class test scores available. Thirty-five of the 45 students dropped from the study were not included because two instructors failed to return test score sheets for their sections. The remaining 10 students were not included because their HSU could not be determined.

Students included in the final sample were retained even though they may have lacked some test scores or did not answer questions relating to the IY variable. The descriptions of analyses which involved missing data of this sort specify the degree and cause of the missing data. When attrition was so great that the results of the analysis might have been biased, evidence relating to bias was examined.

Instruments

The data used in this study were gathered from three sources: (a) the French placement and proficiency examination, (b) in-class tests and final grades, and (c) a student questionnaire.

Placement and proficiency exam. The CEEB College Placement Test (French Reading Achievement Test) is used by UIUC to place or grant proficiency credit to students who have French high school credit and wish to take a French course at UIUC. Students who took this examination prior to fall semester 1975 and scored below the cutting score for 102 placement were assigned to 101 sections.

In-class tests and final grades. The eight classroom tests administered during the semester were constructed by members of the French Department and were administered as a regular part of the course. The same exams were administered to all students. The first test, Quiz A, occurred at the end of the first week of classes; subsequent tests were administered every two weeks in the following order: Quiz 1, Quiz 2, Hourly 1, Quiz 3, Hourly 2, Quiz 4, and the Final Exam. The quizzes tested material presented in the two weeks preceding their administration. Hourly 1 tested all material which preceded its administration and Hourly 2 tested material covered between Hourlies 1 and 2. The Final Exam items were based on all of the material presented during the semester with emphasis on material covered after Hourly 2.

The final grades (A through E) were calculated using letter grades assigned to the quizzes, hourlies, and Final Exam scores. Cutting scores for determining test grades were the same across 101 sections as were the weights which were applied to the final grade components.

Questionnaire. A student questionnaire provided the following background information:

1. Student status.
2. Number of French HSU.
3. Foreign language studied in high school.
4. The month and year the last high school French course was completed.
5. Whether or not the French placement and proficiency test had been taken.

Procedure

Instructors recorded each student's identification number, test scores, final grade, and drop status on a machine-scannable form designed

for this purpose. The information on these forms was automatically transferred to IBM cards to create the score deck.

The student questionnaire was administered during the eighth week of class. Students responded on machine-scannable answer sheets. One of the class members collected the questionnaires and answer sheets and returned them directly to the authors by mail. The questionnaire responses were automatically transferred to IBM cards to create the questionnaire deck. Students with a score card but no questionnaire card were contacted by phone to gain the necessary background information. A tape search to find HSU information was undertaken for students who could not be reached by phone. The score and questionnaire decks were merged to form a single deck.

Following this, the deck which contained each student's score and background data was matched with administrative data tapes to provide the French placement and proficiency exam scores for those students who had taken the test within the last five years. This information was added to the final deck.

Data Analysis

The statistical manipulations of the data gathered in this study were done at a descriptive level; inferential tests and parameter estimates were not made. The rationale for this decision relates to the intended use of the findings and the nature of the data gathered. There was little interest in statistically significant differences which were not large enough to be of practical import. There was no particular population of interest for which parameter estimates would be useful to obtain. Group sizes varied radically for some comparisons and were quite small for others so that the value of using inferential techniques was viewed as quite tenuous.

Results

Composition of French 101

The final sample consisted of 283 students, or 86% of the total fall 1975 French 101 enrollment. Since the bulk of students not included in the study were members of the two sections which were dropped completely from the study, there was no reason to believe that the results reported were biased by selective attrition.

An examination of the distribution of French HSU within the final sample showed that 30% had none, 7% had 1 HSU, 49% had 2 HSU, and 6% had 3 HSU. Of the 107 students with no high school French, 86% reported that they had taken a foreign language other than French in high school, 8% reported taking no high school foreign language, and 6% did not respond to this question.

Table 1 shows the distribution of IY for the 176 students with French HSU. Clearly, the most frequent HSU-IY combination was 2 units completed two years before UIUC 101 enrollment. Thirty-eight percent of the students fell into this category. The rest of the students were fairly evenly distributed throughout the remaining HSU-IY combinations.

Table 1

Distribution of Students with
Various Combinations of HSU and IY

HSU	IY						
	0	1	2	3	4+	No IY Data	Total
1	1 (1)[a]	3 (2)	0	5 (3)	7 (4)	3 (2)	19 (11)
2	13 (8)	15 (9)	66 (38)	14 (8)	18 (10)	13 (8)	139 (79)
3	4 (2)	7 (4)	0	1 (1)	3 (2)	3 (2)	18 (10)
Total	18 (10)	25 (14)	66 (38)	20 (11)	28 (16)	19 (11)	176

[a]Percent of 176 in parentheses

It should be noted that for 1 and 3 HSU, intervening years and units were negatively related. That is, students with 1 HSU tended to have completed their high school French earlier than students with 3 HSU.

Placement Exam Scores for Students with French HSU

Students who scored below 420 on the CEEB French Reading Achievement Test were placed into French 101. The standard score of 420 equals 7 out of 93 items correct after a correction-for-guessing formula has been applied.

CEEB scores were located for 145 of the 176 French 101 students with French HSU. The median CEEB score for these students was 400 or 2 1/2 items correct. The standard scores received at the 25th percentile and 75th percentile were 390 (1 item) and 410 (4 1/2 items), respectively.

In-Class Test Statistics

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics associated with each of the tests. These statistics are based on the test scores of all the students who were included in the final sample and were present the day the test was administered. An examination of the mean number of items correct with respect to the total number of items possible indicated that the first six tests were fairly easy and had very similar difficulty levels. The mean score on these tests ranged between 79% and 83% correct. The last two tests, Quiz 4 (60%) and the Final Exam (72%), had somewhat lower mean scores. All of the test score distributions exhibited some degree of negative skew; that is, test scores bunched toward the upper end of the score range.

Table 2

Test Statistics for In-Class Exams

Test	*N*	$\overline{X}$	*Md*	*SD*	Possible Range
Quiz A	264	12.16	13.01	2.75	0-15
Quiz 1	275	40.64	41.92	7.00	0-50
Quiz 2	267	38.67	40.16	6.80	0-50
Hourly 1	263	74.94	77.89	11.58	0-94
Quiz 3	238[a]	41.89	43.29	5.30	0-50
Hourly 2	248	79.36	80.81	10.82	0-100
Quiz 4	223[b]	30.24	30.04	6.70	0-50
Final	246	120.43	122.50	17.94	0-167

[a]One section of 14 students did not take Quiz 3.

[b]One section of 22 students did not take Quiz 4.

The reliability coefficients (KR-21) calculated for the tests ranged from .75 to .90. All of the coefficients were of a magnitude usually considered acceptable for classroom tests and reflected a moderate to strong degree of internal consistency.

Drops

Of the 283 students included in the study, 29 dropped French 101 after receiving a grade on at least one test. No students dropped after Hourly 1. The drop ratio of students with 0 French HSU was considerably larger compared to the drop ratio of students with French HSU. Nineteen percent of the students with 0 HSU dropped, while only 4% of the students with 1-3 HSU dropped. Of the 21 drops among students with 0 French HSU, 18 reported they had taken another foreign language in high school. Table 3 shows the test means, medians, and standard deviations of students with 0 French HSU who dropped compared to those students with 0 French HSU who did not drop. Inspection of this table indicates that students who dropped received test scores considerably lower than students who completed the course.

High School French Study and French 101 Performance

The relationship between high school French study and French 101 performance was explored in four steps:

1. For each of the tests, the descriptive statistics associated with the distribution of scores received by students with 0, 1, 2, or 3 French HSU were examined.

Table 3

In-Class Test Performance of Students with 0 French HSU
Who Completed or Dropped French 101

Test	Dropped 101				Completed 101			
	N	$\bar{X}$	*Md*	*SD*	*N*	$\bar{X}$	*Md*	*SD*
Quiz A	18	8.33	7.50	3.76	80	11.40	12.17	3.14
Quiz 1	17	33.53	33.67	6.25	86	38.15	40.29	7.87
Quiz 2	10	31.50	32.50	7.62	86	37.08	39.10	7.36
Hourly 1	6	57.17	63.50	15.64	86	71.84	74.00	11.86

2. The test score distributions and associated grade distributions of students with 0 or 2 French HSU were compared across tests.

3. The relationship between IY and in-class test scores of students with 2 French HSU was examined.

4. The distribution of final grades received by students with 0, 1, 2, or 3 French HSU was examined.

All of the data discussed in this and the following sections were based on students who did not drop the course.

Test performance of students with 0, 1, 2, or 3 French HSU. Table 4 shows the means, medians, and standard deviations associated with each of the eight in-class test score distributions for students with 0 through 3 French HSU. Before inspecting this table, it should be noted that with the exception of Quizzes 3 and 4 the small differences in the number of students taking each test were due to individual absence. A section of 12 students did not take Quiz 3 and a section of 17 students did not take Quiz 4. An inspection of the distribution of French HSU in these two sections compared to the overall group showed a slight underrepresentation of students with 0 HSU and a slight overrepresentation of students with 2 HSU. Examination of the test means which immediately preceded and followed the missing quizzes indicated that these sections performed in a manner similar to the overall group. It was concluded that the statistics associated with Quizzes 3 and 4 were not seriously biased.

Table 4 shows that in almost every case mean and median score increased as French HSU increased. The only reversals occurred between 1 and 2 HSU on Quiz 3 and between 2 and 3 HSU on Quiz 4. The medians showed the same general pattern. A comparison of the means and medians indicated that almost all of the test score distributions for all of the groups were negatively skewed; that is, there was a tendency for scores to bunch at the high end of each of the score ranges.

Table 4

In-Class Test Performance
for Different French HSU Groups

HSU Group	Test Statistics			
	N	$\bar{X}$	*Mi*	*SD*
Quiz A				
0	80	11.40	12.17	3.14
1	16	12.56	12.83	1.59
2	128	12.98	13.36	1.81
3	16	13.56	13.75	1.31
Quiz 1				
0	85	38.15	40.29	7.87
1	17	41.53	44.00	6.47
2	133	42.98	43.78	5.03
3	17	43.82	45.25	3.94
Quiz 2				
0	86	37.08	39.10	7.36
1	17	39.47	40.00	6.21
2	132	40.02	41.14	5.69
3	16	42.00	43.50	5.75
Hourly 1				
0	86	71.84	74.00	11.86
1	17	76.00	77.75	4.19
2	134	77.43	79.50	9.71
3	16	81.13	85.50	8.42
Quiz 3				
0	82	39.95	40.90	5.50
1	15	43.27	45.00	4.37
2	126	42.76	44.10	5.10
3	15	43.87	44.75	3.68
Hourly 2				
0	83	75.93	77.33	11.32
1	17	80.65	81.25	10.94
2	133	80.89	82.92	10.30
3	15	83.40	85.67	8.17
Quiz 4				
0	74	28.81	29.58	6.42
1	14	29.29	29.50	7.91
2	120	31.22	31.63	6.74
3	15	30.40	29.75	5.67
Final Exam				
0	82	117.68	117.33	18.22
1	17	120.53	120.00	17.20
2	132	121.70	124.10	17.79
3	15	124.13	127.75	18.27

Note. Statistics are based only on students who completed the course and received a letter or deferred grade.

Test performance of students with 0 or 2 French HSU. Since students with 0 or 2 French HSU accounted for 79% of the students included in the study, a more detailed examination of the data was confined to these two groups. The data presented in the previous section indicated that, without exception, the mean and median test performance of students with 2 French HSU was greater than that of students with 0 French HSU. In this section, discussion will center on two questions: (a) How much of the variability in the test performance of students with 0 or 2 French HSU could be accounted for by units, and (b) Did the amount of variability accounted for by 0 or 2 HSU change in a systematic way as the semester proceeded?

Since test length, difficulty, and score variability were not the same for each test, the only way to make comparisons across tests was to convert the scores earned by students with 0 or 2 French HSU to a common score scale, in this case the T-score scale. This linear conversion does not change the shape of the distribution of scores, their rank order, or the relative distances between scores on the test scale.[2] The T-scores for each test automatically have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10.

Figure 1 shows the median T-score for students with 0 (solid line) and 2 (dashed line) French HSU for each test. The closed vertical lines define the interquartile ranges for each of these groups on each test. This is a description of variability in that it defines the range lying between the 25th and 75th percentiles. Figure 1 indicates that, for the first six tests, with the exception of Quiz 2, about 75% of the students with 2 HSU scored above the 0 HSU median. Examination of the distributions associated with the last two tests indicated that the difference between the medians of the 0 and 2 HSU groups dropped and that the interquartile ranges showed considerably more overlap.

The point-biserial correlation coefficients which describe the degree of relationship between 0 and 2 French HSU and test scores are shown on the bottom line of Figure 1. These coefficients ranged from a high of .35 on Quiz 1 to a low of .11 on the Final Exam. The general decrease in the magnitude of the point-biserial coefficients across the tests indicated that time spent in French 101 was associated with a decrease in the amount of test score variability that could be accounted for by French HSU. On Quizzes A and 1, about 11% of the variability in test scores could be accounted for by French HSU. For Quizzes 2 and 3 and Hourlies 1 and 2, French HSU accounted for about 6% of the score variability. On the last two tests of the semester, Quiz 4 and the Final Exam, French HSU accounted for about 2% of the test score variability. Though the amount of variability accounted for by HSU is small, the trend is a useful indication of the influence of HSU on performance over time.

For each test except Quiz A, students received their test score and a letter grade as feedback. Letter grades rather than actual test scores

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[2] The means and standard deviations used in the T-score conversion were based only on the test scores of students with 0 and 2 French HSU.

Figure 1. In-class exam medians and interquartile ranges for students with 0 or 2 French HSU.

were used to calculate the final grades. For this reason it was necessary to examine the actual letter grade distributions associated with 0 and 2 French HSU for each test to determine whether the differences found in the distributions of test scores were also reflected in the distributions of grades.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of As, Bs, Cs, Ds, and Es assigned within the 0 and 2 French HSU groups on Quiz 1, Hourlies 1 and 2, and the Final Exam. If HSU were not associated with test grade, one would expect that the percentages assigned within the 0 HSU group be similar to the percentages assigned within the 2 HSU group. Figure 2 indicates that this was not the case for Quiz 1 or Hourlies 1 and 2. That is, students with 0 French HSU tended to receive a larger percentage of lower grades while students with 2 French HSU received a larger percentage of higher grades. This was also the case for Quizzes 2 and 3 which are not shown in Figure 2. Although for both groups the grades received on the Final Exam were lower than on the previous tests, the large discrepancy in percentages of high and low grades observed on the first six tests was not as apparent for either Quiz 4 or Final Exam grades.

Final Grade and High School French Units

Final grades were calculated from the letter grades received on the quizzes, hourlies, Final Exam, and oral performance. Grades on oral performance were not collected for this study because of lack of uniformity of standards across sections.

Table 5 shows the distribution of 101 final grades for 0 through 3 French HSU. These data show that final grade was positively related to HSU. For example, students with 0 HSU received 10% fewer As and 12% more Cs than students with 2 HSU. Unlike the distribution of Final Exam grades which showed a small discrepancy in the grades received by the two groups, the discrepancy in final grades was similar to those found on the test grades received during the middle portion of the semester.

Table 5

Distribution of Final Grades
for Different French HSU Groups

HSU	*N*	Final Grade				
		A	B	C	D	E
0	82	6 (07)[a]	40 (49)	27 (33)	8 (11)	1 (01)
1	17	4 (24)	8 (47)	4 (24)	1 (06)	0 (00)
2	132	30 (23)	64 (49)	28 (21)	7 (05)	3 (02)
3	14	7 (50)	4 (29)	2 (14)	0 (00)	1 (07)

[a]Percent of row in parentheses

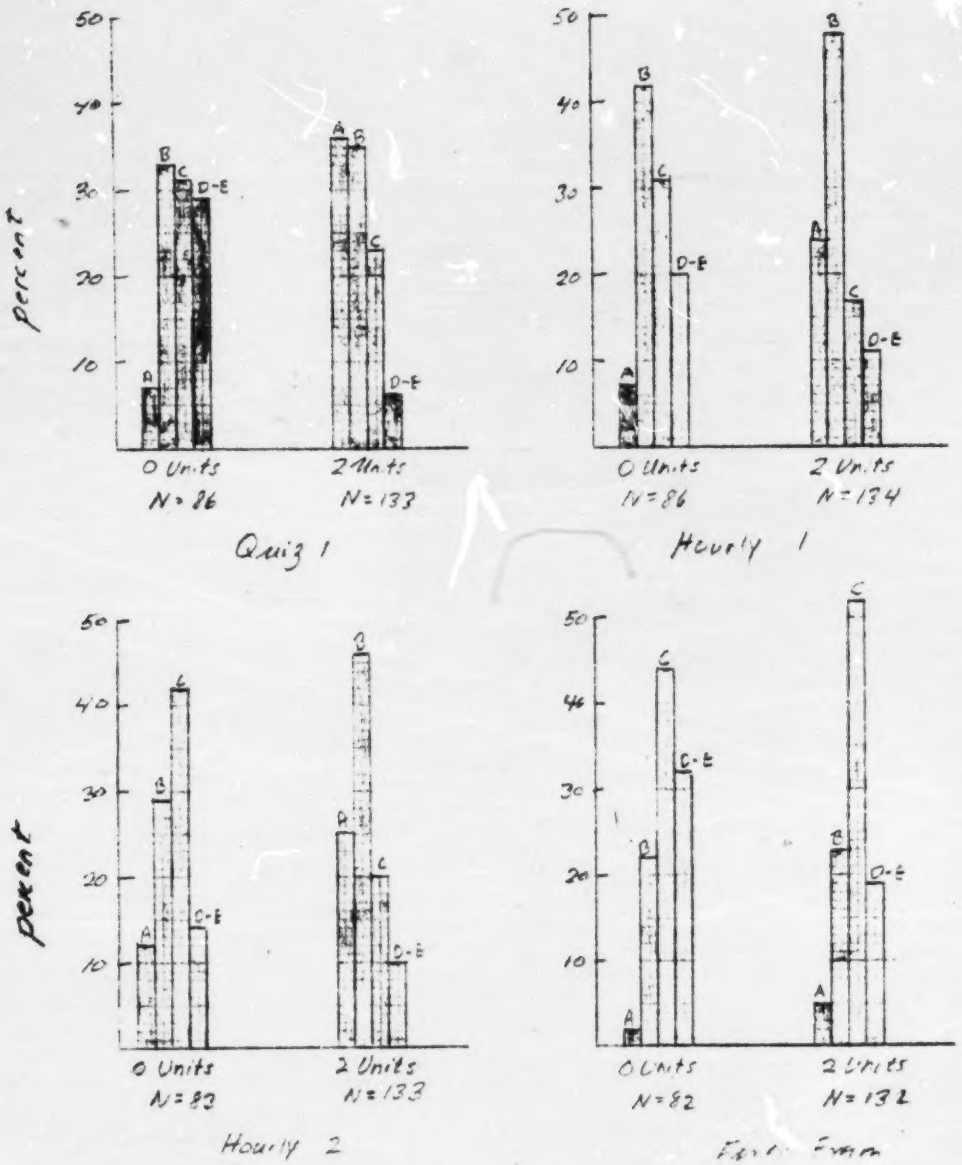

Figure 2. The distribution of test grades for students with 0 and 2 French HSU.

Intervening Years and In-Class Test Performance

The number of months intervening between completion of the last high school French course and the beginning of French 101 was collapsed to years. Examination of the relationship between IY and in-class performance was confined to students with 2 French units. The small numbers of students having 1 or 3 units precluded an investigation of intervening years at these levels.

Table 6 shows the test means, medians, and standard deviations for students with 0, 1, 2, and 3+ intervening years. The data shown in this table are based on 126 of the 139 students who had 2 units. Intervening years data were not available for 13 students. Table 6 indicates that apparently no systematic relationship existed between intervening years and the in-class test performance of students with 2 units.

Summary and Discussion

The UIUC policy of placing students into foreign language courses on the basis of their CEEB Foreign Language College Placement Test performance has created a situation in which students from heterogeneous high school foreign language backgrounds are placed into the same first semester courses. For example, 30% of the students in the fall 1975 French 101 course had 0 French HSU while 49% had 2 French HSU. (These percentages are similar for Spanish, German, and Latin 101 courses.) Data gathered in this study indicated that students with French HSU had various amounts of time intervening between their last high school French course and French 101 enrollment. About 65% of the French 101 students with French HSU had 2 or more years intervening.

Because the placement test scores of students with French HSU who placed into 101 are so low, it has been assumed that relatively homogeneous groups with respect to French achievement are created each year in spite of divergent language backgrounds. But the systematic relationship between French HSU and both drop rates and in-class test scores found in this study indicated that this is not the case.

The drop rate for students with 0 French HSU was much larger than for students with French HSU. Not surprisingly, dropping was associated with poor performance relative to the total group on in-class tests.

An examination of in-class test scores for students who did not drop the course showed that French HSU was positively related to in-class test scores. More detailed comparisons between students with 0 or 2 French HSU indicated that initial differences in test performance levels decreased as the semester progressed. By the time of the final exam, the distribution of test scores associated with the 0 and 2 French HSU groups were quite similar. Although the point-biserial correlation coefficients reflected the diminishing differences between these two groups, none of the coefficients were very large. That is, the differences in mean test scores that could be accounted for by French HSU were relatively small all across the semester.

Table 6

In-Class Test Performance of Students with Two French HSU and Different IY

Intervening Years (IY)	Test Statistics			
	N	$\bar{X}$	*Mdn*	*SD*
Quiz A				
0	12	12.67	12.90	1.50
1	14	12.50	12.83	1.87
2	64	13.27	13.59	1.66
3+	28	12.89	13.25	1.95
Quiz 1				
0	13	42.31	44.75	3.01
1	14	41.79	41.50	4.44
2	64	43.23	44.80	5.43
3+	31	43.97	43.75	4.09
Quiz 2				
0	13	41.31	42.00	4.68
1	13	40.69	41.75	4.99
2	64	39.84	41.25	6.28
3+	31	40.06	40.88	4.93
Hourly 1				
0	13	75.54	79.75	10.28
1	14	75.29	78.00	10.07
2	65	76.86	79.63	10.75
3+	31	80.84	81.75	6.62
Quiz 3				
0	13	43.46	43.25	4.61
1	14	41.57	42.00	5.69
2	63	42.60	44.45	5.50
3+	27	43.70	44.13	2.98
Hourly 2				
0	13	84.23	83.00	6.07
1	14	80.50	82.50	7.76
2	65	80.18	83.88	12.16
3+	30	82.80	83.00	7.02
Quiz 4				
0	13	30.46	28.33	8.21
1	13	29.38	29.38	4.35
2	59	31.63	32.20	6.83
3+	27	32.37	32.33	6.23
Final Exam				
0	13	125.92	121.00	17.52
1	13	120.38	123.00	19.48
2	65	122.05	126.75	18.45
3+	30	123.53	123.83	12.75

The variances or spread of scores associated with each of the in-class tests were relatively small as were the score intervals used to assign test grades. For example, for all but one of the 50-item quizzes, only five or six items correct separated an A from a C. For the two hourlies which were 94 and 100 items in length, only an 11-item score difference separated an A from a C. Although there were only small but consistent differences in test scores found between the 0 and 2 French HSU groups, the score intervals used to assign grades were so small the differences in the test grade distributions were magnified. Differences in test grades received by the 0 and 2 French HSU were particularly evident at the high and low ends of the grading scale. The similarity in the Final Exam grades received by the 0 and 2 French HSU groups was a reflection of the extreme similarity in the Final Exam scores received by these two groups.

The relationship between in-class test grades and French HSU is of importance because final grades were a composite of all in-class test grades rather than a reflection of end-of-semester performance levels. The distribution of final grades showed that a larger percentage of higher grades were assigned to students with 2 French HSU compared to students with 0 French HSU. Thus the relationship between final grade and HSU was similar to the relationship that existed during the middle portion of the semester rather than at the end of the semester.

Because only 17 of the students placed into 101 had 3 French HSU, this group was not examined as closely as students with 2 French HSU. But it should be noted that this group's performance on tests administered during the first three-quarters of the semester was far superior to the test performance of the overall group. All but three of these students received final grades of A or B.

Before discussing the IY variable it should be remembered that a moderate negative relationship existed between French HSU and time intervening between the last high school French course and 101 enrollment. That is, students with 1 unit had more time intervening than students with 3 units. Since there were too few students in the 1 and 3 French HSU groups, the relationship between intervening time and in-class test performance could not be separated from the relationship between French HSU and test scores. Because of this, any differences that existed between 1, 2, and 3 units may in part be due to IY differences. For example, the short IYs associated with the 3 HSU students may partially account for their superior test scores.

Only at the 2 French HSU level could IY be examined systematically. At this level there appeared to be no relationship between IY and in-class test scores. Most of the time lapses were quite long so the possibility that shorter time lapses would show a positive relationship to test performance cannot be eliminated. Among the possible reasons for the large number of fairly long time lapses represented in this sample are the following: (a) Some college preparatory students fulfill the minimal requirement for UIUC entrance in their freshman and sophomore years of high school, (b) some entering students delay taking UIUC French courses until they are sophomores or juniors, and (c) some students with shorter time lapses between high school French and French placement test are placed into higher level French courses.

It was mentioned previously that the majority of students with 2 French HSU who take the CEEB placement test received scores so low that they were placed into the first semester French course. The cutoff score for placement is less than eight items correct. This cutoff is based on data gathered for a validation study (Halff, Tate, & Oboler, Note 2) of the CEEB foreign language placement exams. The average score of the students in the validation study completing French 101 was 8.6 items (corrected for guessing) on a 93-item test. The standard deviation was 7.59. Obviously, either the difficulty level or the item content of this test is inappropriate for separating students with minimal or no French achievement from students who have completed a first semester UIUC French course.

On the basis of the data gathered in the 1975 validation study and the findings of this study, it is reasonable to conclude that the CEEB placement test is not an appropriate instrument for placing students into lower level French courses.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to discuss the generalizability of these results to other 101 foreign language courses. There are several reasons for concluding that the relationship between in-class performance and HSU found in the 1975 French 101 sample is not unique to French or to the particular year studied. A previous study (Halff, Note 1) showed that for 1973 and 1974 French, Spanish, Latin, and German 101 courses a high percentage of students had HSU in the 101 language studied. The average CEEB Foreign Language Placement Test raw score for all of these samples was at or near 0. With the exception of the 1974 German sample, students with 0 HSU in the 101 language studied received lower 101 final grades than students with HSU. Finally, a follow-up of the 1973 samples showed that 102 final grade was not related to HSU. Although the results of this French study do not show directly that for Spanish, Latin, and, possibly, German there exist initial performance differences that diminish across the 101 semester, they coincide with such a conjecture. For these reasons, departments other than French should consider the recommendations offered in the following section.

Recommendations

The current foreign language placement procedure appears to yield a nonhomogeneous group for instructional purposes at the introductory (101) level. The following recommendations are presented as means of reducing and/or solving this problem and some related issues.

1. A new placement instrument should be developed which is more sensitive to important differences in achievement levels at the introductory level. Commercial exams currently available do not match content with the local curriculum adequately and are not geared to discriminate at the achievement levels possessed by introductory students.

2. Special sections of 101 courses should be made available for students with 0 HSU in the language they elect to study. This is an interim recommendation; special sections should not be required after a new placement instrument has been developed and implemented. Special sections could

reduce the obvious competition between students with divergent backgrounds and, perhaps, obviate the differential drop rates observed in this study. Standards for end-of-semester achievement should not be altered for students in these special sections. (Special sectioning had been implemented at the time of this writing.)

3. A follow-up study should be conducted to evaluate the impact of special sectioning. The value of such a study is dependent, in part, on the time required to implement a new placement test. The study could also shed light on the differential drop rates identified in the present study. The impact of special sectioning on the 102 performance of these students should be evaluated to check for possible changes in performance standards in 101. The follow-up data would also be useful in assessing the validity of a new local examination.

4. The in-class achievement and Final Exam performance of the small number of students with 3 HSU enrolled in 101 was generally markedly above that of the other groups. It is recommended that, as an interim procedure at least, this small number of people be screened by a departmental representative to assess their entry level more accurately. The screening could take place during advance enrollment and/or during the first week of the semester. It appears logical to believe that students with 3 HSU could succeed in the 102 course with some extra effort, perhaps, in the first couple of weeks in the course.

5. Though the IY variable data in this study showed that time may not be influential, the data available were not complete enough to warrant drawing conclusions. Logically or theoretically, time would seem to be an influential factor in assessing achievement status for placement purposes. In view of this, advisors should urge students who intend to continue study in a foreign language to begin that study during their first semester at UIUC. If, for example, a year elapses between the time a student takes the placement test and the time of enrollment, the placement test score generally would no longer adequately represent his/her achievement level.

6. The following recommendation is based on the rationale presented in the previous recommendation. High school counselors should recommend to their advisees who intend to study only two years of a language in high school that the language be studied in the last two years rather than the first two years.

7. Language departments should examine their grading philosophies in terms of the meaning that a course grade should represent. Data in this study suggested that course-end performance status (as measured by the Final Exam) was not well-represented by the distribution of course grades. Should grades reflect end-of-course competence level or should they reflect some composite of achievement status sampled from throughout the semester? The former seems to be a more logical meaning for grades in courses which are sequential in nature.

Reference Notes

1. Halff, N. *The relationship between first and second semester foreign language final grades and high school foreign language units* (Research Memorandum No. 181). Urbana, Il.: University of Illinois, Measurement and Research Division, Office of Instructional Resources, 1975.

2. Halff, N., Tate, R., & Oboler, L. *An empirical evaluation of the CEEB foreign language placement tests and their use in the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign placement and proficiency system* (Research Report No. 351). Urbana, Il.: University of Illinois, Measurement and Research Division, Office of Instructional Resources, 1975.